



MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

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The Remnants of Lasita

Along the western edge of Riley County, there was once a small community known as Lasita. Although always small, it was once a bustling community with a school, a post office, and a train depot. Today, little remains of the town, but there are a few remnants to mark the place where a community of Riley Countians once lived.

At some point prior to 1880, early settler Michael Senn and his family relocated from Dickinson County and settled on land in Fancy Creek Township in western Riley County. The family's farm was sited such that every direction provided a beautiful view of the prairie. One of the Senns' daughters was struck by the natural beauty of the land and reportedly exclaimed, "What a site!" Before long, the name for their farmstead became "the site" and then transitioned to "Lasita" (pronounced "La-SITE-uh"). The name Lasita ultimately became the name of a small community in Riley County, with the Senn family serving as its first residents (Slagg, 184).

Michael Senn was born in Switzerland in 1840 and came to America with his parents when he was 15, and the family lived in Wisconsin ("Obituary"). Other family members had settled in Enterprise in Dickinson County, and the Senn family moved there in 1858 (Pioneers). When the Civil War started a few years later,



Top, the town of Lasita. Middle, the Lasita school. Bottom, the Snell Mill and Grain Co. elevator and Lasita train depot. All three photos are courtesy of the Riley County Historical Society and Museum.

Michael enlisted with a cavalry unit and served for the duration of the war ("Obituary").

After the war, Michael returned to Enterprise, and he married Josephine Meyer in 1868. He

opened the town's first general store in 1869 (Pioneers), and later, he was involved with woolen mills and establishing a post office as well as other interests ("Obituary"). In 1877, Michael purchased land in Fancy Creek Township, and sometime between 1877 and 1880, the family moved to the farmstead. He opened a general store on his property (Pioneers), which was the start of the community of Lasita.

When railroad lines were being planned to cross Riley County, Michael Senn contacted the Kansas Central Railroad Company and encouraged it to run a line through Lasita. The rail line would serve as a shipping point for livestock and grain in the western part of Riley County. When the railroad was completed in 1881, it included a stop in Lasita, with two passenger trains and two freight trains arriving daily (Slagg, 184-185). As happened with other frontier towns, the arrival of the railroad drew

people to the community, and Lasita soon had stockyards, a grain elevator, a creamery, a blacksmith shop, a two-story school, and several homes, and Michael Senn expanded his general store. By 1892, Lasita had a post office, which Michael had helped to establish. The upper floor of the two-story school functioned as a
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gathering place for community meetings and church services, as Lasita had no permanent church building (Slagg, 185).

Lasita was always a small community. Its population in 1910 was approximately 35 people, who were primarily business owners and their families. Other community members consisted of neighboring farmers who used Lasita's services and whose children attended the school. Even though Michael Senn came from such a small town, he was elected to serve in the Kansas House of Representatives and also the Kansas Senate in the 1890s (Pioneers).

While Lasita had a post office, school, and a few businesses as mentioned, it never had a bank, a restaurant, a hotel, or a church like other larger towns did (VanGilder). Lacking these other typical services that attract people, Lasita was destined to stay a small town.

Despite its smallness, Lasita was described as a "lively country town" and continued to be so for 50 years (Slagg, 185). The rise of the automobile, however, was one of the factors that led to Lasita's decline. As more and more rural people acquired automobiles, there became less need for local farmers to use Lasita's services because they could more easily drive to larger communities and take advantage of additional services available in those towns (VanGilder), such as a bank.

The automobile also contributed to the closing of Lasita's post office. Automobiles improved mail delivery and allowed the postal service to consolidate many smaller post offices (VanGilder). The Lasita post office closed in 1935

(Slagg, 185).

Another factor that contributed to Lasita's demise was the Depression. The economic devastation of the stock market crash and the ensuing years of the Depression impacted railroad companies, and many saved money by cutting services to smaller branch lines (VanGilder). The railroad discontinued service to Lasita in 1936 (Slagg, 185).

With no post office and no rail line to serve the grain elevator, Lasita continued to decline. The school managed to hang on a short while longer, but as enrollment decreased, Lasita's few students were sent to a neighboring district. The school finally closed in the 1940s (VanGilder).

Today, there is little left of Lasita. The few remnants include the town's cemetery and the grain elevator, which sits on a high spot and can be seen for quite a distance as one approaches the old town site. The elevator was built by Michael Senn in 1904. The Dec. 3, 1903, edition of *The Leonardville Monitor* includes a brief notice that Michael was in the process of building a grain elevator. A notice in a January 1904 newspaper indicates the elevator would soon be ready for business ("Arbor"). After only a few months of operation, the elevator was struck by lightning. Luckily, Lasita citizens with the aid of a group of railroad workers and nearby ball players were able to quickly douse the fire before it caused much damage ("The grain").

Around 1905, Michael Senn had retired, and a newspaper notice indicated the Midland Elevator Company was renting the elevator and Lasita resident Frank Lund was the manager ("The Midland"). In



Top, the Lasita grain elevator. Middle, the last photo taken of the elevator when it was in operation, with Jim Lippert and Clem Caley. The photo is courtesy of Beverly Lippert Caley. Bottom, the road sign that marks the location of the former town of Lasita.

1907, the elevator was sold to the Snell Mill and Grain Company of Clay Center ("M. Senn has sold"). A newspaper notice in 1911 stated the Snell elevator had opened for business ("Opened"), which could mean the Snell company had acquired the elevator in 1907 but hadn't started fully using it until 1911, or the intention of the notice might have been more of a form of advertising to remind readers to bring their business to the Snell elevator in Lasita.

After Michael Senn retired, Frank Lund purchased the inventory from Michael's store and opened his own mercantile while continuing (continued on pg. 3)

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uing to manage the elevator (“Frank”). At some point in the early 1900s, Frank became the owner of the elevator (Caley).

In the 1940s, ownership of the elevator changed hands, and Ted and Elsie Doyle became the new owners. The Doyles’ son remembers riding with Ted to haul wheat to the railhead in Bala while Elsie ran the elevator. In the mid-1950s, Warren and Maxine Lippert, who operated the Lippert Grain Company, acquired the Lasita elevator. The Lipperts ran the elevator until Warren passed away in 1962. After Warren’s death, their teenage son ran the elevator in Lasita by himself through the summer of 1962, but that was the last year the elevator was operational. The Lippert Grain Company also had an elevator in Green, which is still in operation, and the business continued to use the elevator in Lasita for storage for several years, but the elevator has since been dormant for half a century (Caley).

Becky Lee Brenner is the current owner of the elevator and has owned it since the mid-1990s. For many years, she lived in the former Senn home, which was Lasita’s last remaining house. The elevator was just across the road

from her home, and when the opportunity to purchase the elevator came along, she jumped at the chance to own a significant piece of Lasita’s history. The elevator’s interior had been gutted prior to Becky Lee’s purchasing it, and it was potentially in danger of being torn down. Becky Lee says that part of her motivation in purchasing the elevator was to protect it from demolition, although she realizes the structure will eventually fail. A number of Becky Lee’s neighbors who remember hauling their grain to the Lasita elevator have expressed their appreciation that her ownership has protected the elevator from destruction and has allowed it to remain a reminder of the Lasita community.

Michael Senn passed away in 1923 when Lasita was still a “lively country town” and didn’t witness the demise of the town he’d help to establish. With no post office, railroad, school, or functional grain elevator, Lasita slowly died, and its buildings disappeared as the years went by.

Today, the cemetery, a lone house, and the old elevator are the last remnants of a small town of hardy souls in western Riley County known as Lasita.

“Arbor news.” The Leonardville Monitor. 7 January 1904: 4.



Above, the Lasita cemetery.

- Caley, Beverly Lippert. “Re: Lasita.” Message to Kathy Dzewaltowski. 15 January 2020. Email.
- “Frank Lund.” The Manhattan Mercury. 21 June 1905: 5.
- “The grain elevator at Lasita.” The Leonardville Monitor. 25 August 1904: 5.
- Jeremiah T. VanGilder, “Lasita, Riley County,” *Lost Kansas Communities*, accessed January 4, 2020, <https://lostkansascommunities.omeka.net/items/show/56>.
- “Ma. Senn.” The Leonardville Monitor. 3 December 1903: 5.
- “M. Senn has sold.” The Manhattan Nationalist. 16 May 1907: 11.
- “The Midland Elevator Company.” The Manhattan Nationalist. 4 October 1906: 8.
- “Obituary – M. Senn.” The Manhattan Republic. 20 September 1923: 1.
- “Opened up for business.” The Leonardville Monitor. 29 June 1911: 1.
- Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie. Manhattan, Kansas: Riley County Genealogical Society, 1976.
- Slagg, Winifred N. Riley County, Kansas. Manhattan, KS: Ted Varney’s University Book Store, 1968.

Historic Preservation Advocacy Day

The M/RCPA, in conjunction with the Friends of Historic Preservation, is planning an advocacy day in Topeka for historic preservation supporters. The date will be Wednesday, March 4, 2020, and the location will be the Kansas Statehouse.

Participants will have the opportunity to meet with legislators.

Space is limited, and there will be a registration process for those who are interested in participating. More details will be provided as the date approaches.

Updated Logo

The M/RCPA celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2019 and commemorated the occasion with a special 25th anniversary logo. Now in our 26th year, the logo has been updated with “Since 1994.” The M/RCPA would like to thank Chris Chamberlin and Timber and Stone Architecture + Design for the M/RCPA’s updated logo.



First Christian Church

As settlers arrived in Manhattan in its early years, they came from various church backgrounds and quickly established church congregations upon arrival. By 1864, there were several community members representing the Christian church denomination, and a meeting was held in the spring of 1864, an organization was established, and a pastor selected. The members met in a school, and the congregation steadily increased in numbers over the next two years. Then in 1866, the pastor resigned and the organization ceased to exist for a time. The following year of 1867, a group of Christian church members met again, re-organized, selected a pastor, and met regularly from then on. The congregation lacked a permanent building, and services were held in homes and various meeting halls (Stratton).

The congregation raised the funds to construct a church building, and construction began in the spring of 1873 and was completed the fall of 1874. The building was described as a modest frame building and was located at Fifth and Humboldt Streets. The labor to build the church had been largely provided by church members, with George Haines serving as head carpenter and Jacob Winne doing the stone work. Mr. Winne had also worked on Anderson Hall on the Kansas State campus (Stratton).

In 1892, the church building underwent improvements. The interior was painted, new wallpaper applied, and the plain glass windows on the building's sides were replaced with stained glass ("The interior"). A tower with entrance doors was also added to the exterior (Stratton).



Above, a vintage photo of the First Christian Church. The photo is courtesy of the Riley County Historical Society and Museum.

The congregation grew, and in early 1907, church members started thinking about a new building. The church's officers spent six months considering the idea and had done some preliminary planning before presenting the idea to the congregation. Once presented, church members engaged in what a news article described as quiet, earnest work as they contemplated next steps. Before long, over \$4,000 in pledges had been committed toward the construction of a new building. The specifics of the building had not been determined, but members planned to place the new building on the existing site at Fifth and Humboldt Streets, construct the building of stone, and they estimated it would cost \$12,000 ("New house").

The Christian church formed a building committee, which traveled about Kansas, visiting other churches to gather information and ideas ("The Christian church building"). Once church members were ready, they hired the architecture firm Spuhler and Brinkman to develop plans and specifications for the new church ("Spuhler"). As the plans took shape, the architects estimated the

building would cost closer to \$20,000, and despite the unexpected higher cost, the congregation decided to move forward with constructing the basement and planned to finish the remainder of the building as soon as possible ("Christian church").

When the church project went to bid, contractor J. M. Correll was the low bidder ("Corraled"). Church members were pleasantly surprised that Mr. Correll's bid was \$14,390 and far lower than the estimated \$20,000. The congregation didn't have the \$14,390 on hand, but Mr. Correll was agreeable to giving them 60 days to raise the remaining money. If church members weren't successful, then they would stick to the original plan to construct only part of the building ("Work").

Since the plan was to locate the new building on the existing site, the first order of business was to remove the old church. The city granted permission to move the church ("Council"), and it was relocated to Moro Street between Juliette Avenue and Eighth Street ("Christian church notes"). Once the lot was cleared, work began immediately on what was called the "first basement story." As work moved forward, J. C. Holland was now listed as the project architect. Mr. Holland also designed the Riley County Courthouse ("The new Christian").

The new building was described as "a departure from conventional styles of church architecture," which was in keeping with a movement in the Christian church. It would look more like a fraternal organization's club room than a church, but being made of stone, it
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Preservation Advocacy

As the Kansas legislative session progresses and should issues arise that concern historic preservation, you can help by contacting area legislators and sharing your thoughts. You can also help by contributing to advocacy efforts. The Friends of Historic Preservation is a coalition of preservation advocates and has a contract with a paid advocate. The M/RCPA contributes to the advocate's contract. Contributions should be made payable to Terry Humphrey Public Affairs Group and sent to the address below.

Terry Humphrey Public
Affairs Group
P. O. Box 4953
Topeka, KS 66604

The Kansas Preservation
Alliance (KPA), which is a
statewide organization, also
advocates for historic
preservation, and you may be
interested in joining KPA.

Kansas Preservation Alliance
P. O. Box 2506
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Manhattan/Riley County
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The Board of Directors meets the
second Thursday of the month,
and members are welcome to
attend board meetings.

Newsletter editor: Kathy Dzewaltowski

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would harmonize with the Courthouse and the Carnegie Library ("The new Christian").

The "first basement story" was completed in November 1908, but with a congregation of 500 members, it wasn't long before members felt the partial building was inadequate, and the decision was made to build the second story ("To finish"), which was estimated to cost \$10,000.

Work began almost immediately, and the building was completed in November 1909. A dedication service was scheduled for Nov. 14, 1909, and carpet was still being laid and pews installed a few days before the dedication, but the building was ready on the big day. Pastors from other local churches were invited to speak and share the special occasion ("Dedication"). The congregation still owed \$11,000 for the building, and \$7,000 in cash and pledges were raised during the dedication service ("A great").

In 1937, the congregation planned to construct an addition on the north side for Sunday School classes and also to do interior renovations. While the building was worked on, services were held at the Community House. The addition and renovations were completed and dedicated in January 1938 ("Church").

Another major church renovation occurred in 1962. The renovations doubled the size of the educational space, remodeled the sanctuary, and provided a new narthex for the front of the sanctuary (Sykes). The improvements were dedicated in January 1963.

Recently, the First Christian Church constructed a new building on the west side of Manhattan and began holding services in the new building in May 2019. The building at Fifth and Humboldt Streets was leased to another congregation to use for services.

The January 21, 2020 edition of *The Manhattan Mercury* indicated Riley County has engaged in negotiations to purchase the church. The county's plans for the building are unknown.

With a 110-year history, the First Christian Church has long been a part



Above, the First Christian Church in 2020.

of the community's cultural landscape as well as a significant building in Manhattan's downtown. And, while its use might change in the future, hopefully, it will continue to be an important community asset for many more years to come.

"Christian church." *The Manhattan Nationalist*. 26 September 1907: 3.

"The Christian church building." *The Manhattan Nationalist*. 28 February 1907: 9.

"Christian church notes." *The Manhattan Nationalist*. 30 April 1908: 9.

"Church to be ready Sunday." *The Manhattan Mercury*. 1 January 1938: 1.

"Corraled contract." *The Manhattan Mercury*. 13 May 1908: 1.

"Council meeting." *The Manhattan Nationalist*. 19 March 1908: 1.

"Dedication Sunday." *The Daily Mercury*. 11 November 1909: 1.

"To finish church." *The Daily Nationalist*. 6 February 1909: 1.

"A great day." *The Daily Nationalist*. 15 November 1909: 1.

"The interior." *The Manhattan Republic*. 2 June 1892: 7.

"The new Christian church." *The Manhattan Mercury*. 17 June 1908: 7.

"A new house of worship." *The Manhattan Mercury*. 13 February 1907: 1.

"Spuhler and Brinkman." *The Manhattan Mercury*. 1 May 1907: 8.

Stratton, W. T. *A Brief History of the First Christian Church, Manhattan, Kansas: 1870 to 1945*. First Christian Church, 1945.

Sykes, Mildred S. *The Story of First Christian Church, Manhattan, Kansas*. First Christian Church, 1984.

"Work has commenced." *The Manhattan Nationalist*. 14 May 1908: 14.

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2019-20 M/RCPA Membership Roster

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Lacy Fisher

\$35 Historic Level

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It's time to renew! If you don't see your name in the membership roster above, then it's time for you to renew.